Inglés Enciclomedia: A Ground-Breaking Program for Young Mexican Children?[*]

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical analysis of *Inglés Enciclomedia,* the Mexican federal policy and software that brings the English language to all public 6th and 5th grade classrooms, from a critical applied linguistics and multimodal lens. The analysis is juxtaposed with the reality found in an urban afternoon school in Oaxaca. The analysis focuses on the introductory component of *Inglés Enciclomedia*, its general pedagogical suggestions, and one unit of study. This paper connects *Inglés Enciclomedia*'s strengths to best practices in teaching English to children. It also criticizes it because it connects English to the United States, its stereotypes, and the so-called native speakers, reinforces the hegemony of the Spanish language over Indigenous languages, and includes content that do not speak to the realities of low-SES children. This paper concludes with suggestions for future versions of *Inglés Enciclomedia* and calls for a multilingual and intercultural approach in teaching English to Mexican children.

Este artículo presenta un análisis crítico de *Inglés Enciclomedia*, la política federal mexicana y el software que trae el idioma inglés a todos los salones de 5º y 6º grado de primarias públicas, desde una perspectiva de lingüística aplicada crítica y de múltiples multimodales. El análisis se yuxtapone a la realidad encontrada una escuela vespertina urbana en Oaxaca. El análisis se enfoca en la sección introductoria de *Inglés Enciclomedia*, sus sugerencias didácticas generales, y una unidad de estudio. Se conectan las fortalezas de *Inglés Enciclomedia* a las prácticas modelos en la enseñanza de inglés a niños. También se critica este programa porque conecta el inglés con los Estados Unidos, con sus estereotipos, y con los llamados hablantes nativos, refuerza la hegemonía del idioma español sobre las lenguas indígenas, e incluye contenidos que no corresponden a las realidades de los niños de bajos recursos. El artículo concluye con sugerencias para futuras versiones de *Inglés Enciclomedia* y un llamado a incluir un enfoque multilingüe e intercultural en la enseñanza del idioma inglés a los niños mexicanos.

Introduction

> *Mexican children are running and playing in a school patio. Their brown faces, worn-out uniforms and brick classrooms depict a middle-low socio-economic public school. The narrator of the Internet video, created by the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP henceforth), begins with, "Education in Mexico faces great challenges, and in different occasions, very serious difficulties to overcome these challenges. One of these challenges is the need for our children to learn English in order for them to better communicate in a context of global integration. So far our children*

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have been lacking something indispensable: their teachers' knowledge of the English language, so their teachers can teach them [this language]. Today, we are breaking this limit, thanks to Inglés Enciclomedia. A system, so that any teacher can teach English to their students without having to speak this language." (SEP / ILCE, 2007, our translation) (1)

In their desire to compete economically with other nations, many Asian countries—Japan, Korea, and Taiwan (Butler, 2004; Kanno, 2007; Shin, 2007), European countries—Spain and France (Etxeberría-Sagastume, 2006; Helot, 2008) and Middle-Eastern countries—Turkey (Atay & Kurt, 2006) to name a few examples, have started teaching English in elementary schools. Other Latin American countries such as Colombia (de Mejía & Montes Rodríguez, 2008) and Argentina (Tocalli-Beller, 2007) have also developed language planning projects to introduce English in elementary schools. In Mexico, there are several initiatives in different Mexican states that are piloting English in public elementary schools. The English program in public elementary schools in Coahuila, Mexico, was selected as the innovative educational practice of the year (see SEP, 2002). The state of Morelos has also been piloting an English program in elementary schools (Terborg, García Landa & Moore, 2007). In addition, as briefly stated in the introductory vignette, the federal government has decided to bring the English language to all public 6th and 5th grade classrooms in Mexico through Inglés Enciclomedia, which was to be launched in August, 2008 (Del Valle, 2008a). This policy and software claim that any teacher, with or without knowledge of the English language, will be able to "teach" it (SEP-ILCE, 2007) or "learn English together" with their students (ELLIS-SEP-ILCE, 2006). It is important to critically analyze Inglés Enciclomedia because it will reach millions of Mexican children.

The purpose of this paper is to conduct a critical analysis of Inglés Enciclomedia from a critical applied linguistics and multimodal lens. We will juxtapose our analysis with the reality we found in an urban afternoon school in the city of Oaxaca where we conducted a one-year critical ethnographic action research project (CEAR Project henceforth). The CEAR Project was conducted with the collaboration of ten student teachers. Its purpose was to use the teaching of English as a medium to foster multilingual and intercultural practices, develop elementary school teaching expertise, and co-construct affirming identities among all the participants. The CEAR Project acknowledged that Mexico, constitutionally, is a pluricultural and plurilingual country where Indigenous languages are recognized as national languages at the same level of Spanish (2).

In this article, we will first present a brief description of the urban school included in the CEAR Project as a way to ground our analysis of Inglés Enciclomedia (Blommaert, 2005). Second, we will the present the critical applied linguistic (Pennycook, 2001, 2006, 2007) and multimodal (Kress, 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996) theoretical framework we are using to analyze this program. Third, we will conduct a review of literature, of both academic and media texts, regarding Enciclomedia specifically highlighting the controversies this initiative has created. Fourth, we will present the results of our analysis of the introductory component of Inglés Enciclomedia, the general pedagogical suggestions, and one unit of study. We will conclude with suggestions for future versions of Inglés

Enciclomedia and a call for a multilingual and intercultural approach in teaching English to children.

Downtown School

We gathered information about this school and its student body and their families through one semi-structured interview with the principal, three interviews with the sixth and fifth teachers, and three interviews with 19 sixth grade students and 14 fifth grade students during one academic year. We also conducted six participant classroom observations in these two classrooms and numerous informal observations of recess periods where we interacted with the students in order to gather more information about their lives and language practices. Laura conducted her teaching praxicum in the six grade classroom and Miriam in the fifth grade classroom in the second part of the academic school year. They were able to get to know the students at a personal level.

Escuela Primaria Urbana Vespertina (Downtown School henceforth) is located in the heart of the city of Oaxaca. The principal of Downtown School states that,

There are seventy-six students in our school. Around fifty percent of those students are Indigenous or from an Indigenous background, mostly Triquis and a few from the Sierra Sur, who come to work as mocitos (live-in young servants) in the houses around the school.

Downtown School is part of the mainstream strand, but is an *afternoon* school. "The difference between morning and afternoon schools is the socio-economic status (SES) of the children," reported the principal. It is the school for the Triquis, the poor, the older and the "problematic" children as opposed to the morning school for the middle-class, the Spanish-only speaking "normal" children. Children at Downtown School contribute to their family economy by looking after their younger siblings and doing the housework, by working in the family business, by helping their parents with their jobs, and/or by getting independent jobs. Some children work as *mocitos*, street vendors, and tortilla deliverers among other jobs.

In the two classes we worked with, most parents had low levels of formal schooling and held different jobs. In average, 20% of the parents had no formal schooling, 16% had completed up to third grade of elementary school, 25 % had completed elementary school, 30% middle school, 6% high-school, and only 3% had completed a university degree. These numbers are the norm rather than the exception in Oaxaca and other southern states of Mexico (INEGI, 2006). The children's parents held different jobs. Some of these jobs were: merchants, tortilla makers, butchers, weavers, master masons, *vidrieros* (glass installers), plumbers, cleaners, and housewives among others. A few parents worked in the United States. Only one mother was an accountant and another father a lawyer.

Children at Downtown School grew up in complex families. Seventy percent of the children lived with their parents and siblings. The other 30 % of the children lived in different family structures. A few children lived in houses as *mocitos*. Their parents were either in their hometowns or in the United States. Other children lived with a step-parent. Another student lived with her older aunt. In

addition, other children lived with older siblings while their parents were working in other states of Mexico or in the United States.

We take the reality we found at Downtown School as our footing, as our socio-historical context, to analyze *Inglés Enciclomedia*. In the next section, we describe our theoretical lens.

Critical Applied Linguistics and Multimodalities

It has also been argued that English teaching can be a double-edged sword; in other words, it can reproduce or unsettle power relations. Pennycook (2001) coined the term "critical applied linguistics." He argued that language teachers must continually examine their research and teaching practices if they are to connect English teaching to "questions of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, identity, politics, ideology, and discourse" (p. 10). Pennycook (2006) has warned us about the "many myths about English as a 'marvelous tongue' . . . and the collusionary, delusionary and exclusionary effects of English" (pp. 100-101). In respect to the collusionary effect, Pennycook (2006) argues that "English colludes with multiple domains of globalization, from popular culture to unpopular politics, from international capital to local transaction, from ostensible diplomacy to purported peace-keeping, from religious proselytizing to secular resistance" (pp. 101-102). Regarding the delusionary effect, he claims that there are many myths about how English will improve peoples' lives. Due to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA henceforth) and the products with English labels that Mexico "imports" from the United States, Mexico's small businesses have gone bankrupt because of the unfair-trade NAFTA really imposes (see Arroyo Picard, 2001 for different NAFTA's detrimental effects). In respect to the exclusionary effect, Pennycook (2006) states, "While English opens doors to some, it is simultaneously a barrier to learning, development and employment for others, and thus keeps out far more than it lets in" (p. 103). This seems to be the case in Mexico, where NAFTA seems to work for the extremely rich Mexicans and not for most small businesses. Similarly, English seems to be for the rich, who can afford private schools, and not for the poor. The delusionary effect and liberal arguments for access have driven the Mexican government to bring English, and the many things English may be or turn into, to public elementary schools. Mexican children, including Indigenous students, are confronted with those effects.

The teaching of English can also unsettle power relations. "The teaching of English, like any other pedagogical act, can reinforce existing inequalities in a society, but it can also help to expose these inequalities, and more important, help students explore alternative possibilities for themselves and their societies" (Pierce, 1989, p. 407). One of the examples of the alternative possibilities of the English language comes from a Oaxacan women's cooperative. "Nueva Vida" is a women's cooperative established in an Indigenous weaving community in the Valley of Oaxaca (López Gopar, 2005). In the past, these women would sell their rugs to middle men who did not value their work symbolically or economically. With the collaboration of an American anthropologist, they started learning English. They were introduced to different genres, which in turn increased the value of their product. They designed "about the author" cards in English, which were

attached to their rugs. Their work went from a handicraft piece to an art piece, which had an author with a history in need of acknowledgement. They also designed business cards in English and Spanish. Little by little, this cooperative has increased their business. They have made several visits to the United States where their work is valued both symbolically and economically. We can conclude that English is not something "good" or "bad" in itself. It might be English's collusionary, delusionary and exclusionary effects, our teaching practices, and/or the teaching materials, like *Inglés Enciclomedia*, that may move it towards one or the other.

English is usually accompanied by Information Communication Technologies (ICT henceforth), which have created different types of texts. Typically, text has usually referred to printed words on paper. In other words, a drawing or a song is not considered text. However, with the development of technology, people came to recognize that texts are not confined to the written word (Kress, 2000, 2003); they have become multimodal. For instance, on the Internet, one can find sites that include different "modalities," such as print, photos, videos, sounds, and moving icons, making the webpage a multimodal text. *Inglés Enciclomedia* is a multimodal text. Hence, for this analysis, we also rely on the work of Kress (2000, 2003) and Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996) in social semiotics and multimodalities. According to these authors, humans produce multimodal texts which are complex signs. Kress (2000) states that, "it is now no longer possible to understand language and its uses without understanding the effect of all modes of communication that are copresent in any text" (p. 337). Kress (2003) also argues that text design is always an interested process where humans bring their own agenda to the creation of multimodal texts. Our analysis hence looks at the different modalities present in *Inglés Enciclomedia* and infers the possible subtle, un-intended interests of the producers of this program.

Enciclomedia

In 2000, the people of Mexico elected Vicente Fox to be the new president. Fox defeated the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) political party, which had been in power for over 70 years. Many Mexicans believed that Fox would lead Mexico to become more democratic. According to Reséndiz (2006), this was not to be the case unfortunately. Fox directly intervened in the next electoral process and disappointed Mexicans with its cutting-edge projects (Reséndiz, 2006). One of those "cutting-edge" projects was *Enciclomedia*, which was launched in 2004. Prieto Hernández (2005), who worked as a consultant for this project defines it as follows:

> *Enciclomedia is an educational program with a national reach, whose objective is to improve the quality of public education at the elementary level through the introduction of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the classroom. It uses as its basis the digitalized free textbooks to enrich these [textbooks] with multimedia materials [such as still images and audio and video files produced by government and educational organizations]. (p. 162).*

Treviño Ronzón and Morales Landa (2006) rightly define it as "an informational, educational and *political* program" (n.p., our translation and our emphasis). Fox

and the government officials advertised *Enciclomedia* as the policy that would "change" the national basic education (Comunicación Social SEB, 2008a; *La Crónica de Hoy*, 2005) and would "close the gap for everyone" (Cavanagh, 2004, p. 13). During the planning stages, Mexico was supposed to invest one billion U.S. dollars in this project (Cavanagh, 2004), but ended up spending 1.6 billion US dollars (Del Valle, 2008b). Due to the political transition of power in Mexico, the Mexican congress denied Fox the funding to continue with the project. However, Fox was able to obtain funding from other government institutions (e.g., *Secretaría de Hacienda*) (García, 2007) and continued with the program without realizing that many schools around the country would not even have the trained personnel, the proper classrooms to safeguard the equipment (Sánchez, 2007), or even electricity to be able to run the program (Matías, 2007). This is especially the case in many Indigenous communities in Oaxaca (Matías, 2007). Aviles and Vargas (2006), two news reporters, mocked the validation report of *Enciclomedia* conducted by researchers from Harvard with its newspaper article entitled, "*Descubre* Harvard que Enciclomedia funciona mejor en escuelas con luz" (Harvard *Discovers* that *Enciclomedia* works better in schools with electricity) (italics in original). Consequently, many academics and news reporters viewed this program as "elitist, costly, exclusive, and presidential" (Elizondo Huerta, Paredes Ochoa, & Prieto Hernández, 2006, p. 218, our translation; see Prieto Hernández, 2005 for an analysis of 130 articles published in 2004 regarding *Enciclomedia*).

In spite of the political and financial controversies, *Enciclomedia* was "installed" and is still "in use" in most public elementary schools across the country. Even though *Enciclomedia* is a national project, there have been few research studies focused on *Enciclomedia*. Of those, one study focused on *Enciclomedia*'s application from the teacher perspectives (Sánchez Rosete, 2006), a couple others focused on different student populations such as students with special needs (Puentes Jiménez, López Rodríguez, Ramos Campos, Mota Leyva & Villagómez Parra, 2007) and students in rural communities (Treviño Ronzón & Morales Landa, n.d.). Altamirano (2006) focused on *Enciclomedia* and cognition and Hernández Luviano (2005) on the use of images as a pedagogical strategy. All these studies concluded that children may benefit with *Enciclomedia* as long as teachers use it as a pedagogical tool to enhance their teaching practice. In a more comprehensive study of *Enciclomedia* by the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales México (2008), it was concluded that,

> *the infrastructure aspect has received much more attention . . . than the components related to the improvement of education . . . teacher preparation . . . focused populations' [teachers' and children's] perceptions [of the program,] . . . and the impact of the program on teachers' pedagogical practices and students' learning. (pp. 109-110, our translation)*

Ramírez Romero (2006) concludes that more research is needed on the use of ICT and the ways that it is being incorporated into education. He also states that "it seems that there is more concern about 'making things' than about thinking about them and evaluating what has been done" (p. 63, our translation, quotation marks in original). More longitudinal and in-depth studies of ICT are needed. In the next section, we will conduct a critical analysis of *Inglés Enciclomedia* as a

first step toward evaluating what is been done in Mexico regarding ICT and the incorporation of English in public elementary schools.

Inglés Encliclomedia

"*Inglés Enciclomedia* was created especially to be implemented in the public elementary schools of Mexico, with the goal of including the English language as part of the curriculum" (ELLIS-SEP-ILCE, 2006, p.1, our translation). It "is designed in a way for teachers and students to learn together" (p. 1, our translation). In other words, according to the program, teachers do not need to know English in order to teach it. *Inglés Enciclomedia* makes use of ICT and has three basic components: an interactive program, a student workbook, and a teacher's guide. The government of Mexico hired Pearson's ELLIS (English Language Learning and Instruction System), a U.S. company, to design and produce *Inglés Enciclomedia* (ELLIS-SEP-ILCE, 2006). The software runs using *Enciclomedia* Version 2.0, which has been installed in most states. Oaxacan schools are still waiting for the installation of this version.

Inglés Enciclomedia is meant to be completed in one or two school years. The program is divided in two volumes. Each volume includes four units of study. Each unit has eight lessons: the first six include exercises, activities, and games, the seventh unit is a review and the last one includes the evaluation of the unit. Each lesson includes communicative objectives, grammar and uses (functions), vocabulary, and dialogues. Up to this point, only Volume One has been printed and distributed to the different states. According to Avendaño Aquino, who is in charge of professional development in the Department of Technology in the state of Oaxaca, *Inglés Enciclomedia* Volume Two is ready for printing; however, there is no federal funding at the moment to do so and the different States will have to finance it themselves if they wish to use it (Avendaño Aquino, personal communication, January 2009).

Subsecretaría de Educación Básica (2009) claims that *Inglés Enciclomedia* has been tested and "perfected" through pilot projects conducted in the academic year 2005-2006. ELLIS-SEP-ILCE (2006) asserts the same. They tested out the program in different states around the country with the assistance of The Anglo Mexican Foundation (3). The results included the students' average score in each unit. In the pilot studies' presentation of the results however, there is no mention of the content of *Inglés Enciclomedia*. It appears that the government officials and its supporters approve of it solely on the basis of test results (Comunicación Social Gobierno de Tamaulipas, 2008; Comunicación Social SEB, 2008b; Gobierno del Estado de Quintana Roo, 2008; Manjarrez Vargas, 2008) without analyzing the contents of the program and the different messages it may send to children and teachers. What follows is our analysis of *Inglés Enciclomedia*. We had full access to the student workbook and the teacher's guide, and semi-full access to the software via the tutorial program downloadable from Subsecretaría de Educación Básica (2009).

In the following section, we will briefly describe the three basic components of *Inglés Enciclomedia*. The focus of our analysis will be on the overall program and the software, the general pedagogical suggestions, and specifically Unit Two of Volume One.

Interactive Software

The English lessons are conducted through computers using a smart board. According to ELLIS-SEP-ILCE (2006), the software has the following characteristics allowing:

1. The students' participation in each activity.
2. The use of video, animations, games, and songs.
3. The use of a large number of attractive and dynamic materials.
4. English language learning [that occurs] in an active and enjoyable way, stimulating the use of English in each class.
5. The review of students' homework and evaluation of each unit. (p.3, our translation)

The software teaches "grammar, vocabulary, conversation, reading comprehension, listening, and pronunciation" (ELLIS-SEP-ILCE, 2006, p. 3, our translation) by following a four- or five-step sequence in each lesson: "Let's Learn," "Let's Practice," "Let's Play," and "Let's Review" (p. 9). Some of the lessons include a "Let's Sing" component.

The "Let's Learn" section includes interactive animations, videos, which can be played at normal and slow speed, with the transcription and translation of the dialogues, and lists of vocabulary. The "Let's Practice" section includes: (a) videos with multiple choice exercises, (b) listening activities, accompanied with images and with fill-in the blank exercises; (c) listening activities with sentence-ordering exercises; (d) sorting-out activities; (e) keywords review; (f) connecting audio with images; (g) audio and video conversations with multiple choice exercises; and (h) images with multiple choice exercises. The "Let's Play" section includes six different types of games such as "Hot Shot," in which students practice words while playing basketball, bingo, a memory card game, "Four in a Row," where students practice words while playing a dots game, and "Right or Wrong" activity. The "Let's Practice" section connects the games with activities in the workbook similar to the ones in the previous section. The "Let's Sing" section includes songs for some of the lessons. ELLIS-SEP-ILCE (2006) state that, "with the help of interactive tools and enjoyable activities, the learning of English becomes pleasant and fun" (p. 3, our translation).

The software of *Inglés Enciclomedia* looks appealing and appears to be grounded in "best practices" in teaching children. It provides colorful and interesting materials, games, songs, audio and video files with interactive controls. Children can even record their voices and compare them to those of so-called native speakers. It recycles the vocabulary through various entertaining activities. Nevertheless, the software has major shortcomings. Before presenting the general pedagogical suggestions, we will discuss two of them: the reinforcement of the "one nation, one language" ideology and the native-speaker ideology.

The first problematic aspect is the two flags representing the English and the Spanish language that are displayed on most screens of the software. There is a U.S. flag for English and a Mexican flag for Spanish. Mexican teachers and students click on these flags to listen to instructions in English or Spanish. With every mouse click, Mexican teachers and students are maintaining the nation-state ideology, which is usually represented by a single (*de facto*) official lan-

guage (May, 2001). First, the message sent is that English is spoken only in the United States. The software seems to ignore the fact that English is spoken in other so-called inner circle countries (e.g., England, Canada, Australia, etc.) and, most importantly, in many outer circle countries (e.g., India, Singapore, Ghana, Kenya, Jamaica, etc.) and in the expanding circle countries (e.g., Mexico, Japan, Italy, etc.) (Kachru, 1985). The symbol of the U.S. flag representing the English language may work against the resistance put up by Mexican academics and leaders against the hegemony of the United States. The teaching of English as a subject in middle schools is referred to as "Lengua Adicional al Español" (Language Additional to Spanish) and not "English." However, ELLIS, with its inclusion of the U.S. flag on every screen of the program, reminds Mexican teachers and students that "English" means the United States.

The inclusion of the Mexican flag to represent the Spanish language also reinforces the nation-state ideology and the role of Spanish as the *de facto* official language of Mexico. Constitutionally, Spanish is simply one national language of equal rank with Indigenous languages and is not the official language as it is generally believed (Hidalgo, 2006). In 2003, Mexico constitutionally recognized all Indigenous languages as being national languages and affirmed that all languages have the same rights (López-Gopar & Caballero, 2007). It took Mexican Indigenous peoples and Mexican pro-Indigenous activists almost a century to achieve this recognition. ELLIS, possibly ignorant of Mexican history and the social struggles of Indigenous peoples along with the compliance of the SEP, has placed the Mexican flag to index Spanish. They may reinforce the "one nation, one language" ideology, which first appeared following after Mexico's independence (Heath, 1972). The Mexican flag in *Inglés Enciclomedia* reminds us that the constitutional reforms are still only on paper and are far from being enacted in the day-to-day reality of Mexican society.

Another problem with the software is the validation of the English native-speaker as the possessor of the English language. McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008) argue that this is the tendency when teaching English as an international language. According to these two authors, curriculum developers choose to ignore the fact that so-called English native speakers from the inner-circle countries are the minority. In other words, there are many more speakers of English in the outer and expanding circles than in the inner circle. So-called "non-native speakers" are the majority. However, materials never include voices of speakers who speak English as an additional language, as L2 or L3. In *Inglés Enciclomedia* Mexican teachers and students pronunciation is compared to that of a "native" speaker from an inner circle. Students are presented with only one of the many varieties of the English language. McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008) argue that,

> *EIL [English as an International Language] curricula should include examples of the diversity of English varieties used today . . . which may enhance learners' receptive skills in processing different varieties of English . . . and promote an awareness that English, as an international language, no longer belongs solely to speakers of the Inner Circle. (p. 196)*

Mexican teachers and children may feel inadequate if their performance is always compared to that of a so-called native speaker.

General Pedagogical Suggestions

The Teacher's Guide lists 13 pedagogical suggestions for teachers. These are:

> 1. *Encourage students to participate in class.*
> 2. *Look for methods which enable students to connect the words or sentences that they are learning in English to their daily lives. For instance, if they have already learned greetings, start your class with simple phrases such as "good morning" or "good afternoon".*
> 3. *Make sure all students participate in class.*
> 4. *Ask them to listen and repeat the words five times while they are learning them.*
> 5. *Be aware of the role of corporal movements in the learning process.*
> 6. *Make sure students understand the new knowledge.*
> 7. *Do not spend too much time on a single activity.*
> 8. *Encourage students to practice the writing of words and sentences frequently.*
> 9. *Try to eliminate the use of Spanish during the class.*
> 10. *Involve students in all the activities as much as possible.*
> 11. *Motivate students to share their new knowledge of the English language with their friends and family.*
> 12. *Help students to feel secure when speaking English, making sure that fear and shame are not promoted while making mistakes.*
> 13. *Have fun with your students! (ELLIS-SEP-ILCE, 2006, p. 23, our translation).*

Most of the suggestions in the previous list are usually recommended when teaching languages to young learners. This list states that children should actively participate in class (Enright, 1991; Reilly & Ward, 1997) while having fun (Rixon, 1991). It encourages teachers to use corporal movements—Total Physical Response (TPR) proposed by Asher (1977), and to be aware that children have a short attention span (Brown, 1994). It instructs teachers to make sure children understand the new knowledge—Krashen's (1982) comprehensible input theory. It also encourages teachers to create a classroom atmosphere where students can feel safe when making mistakes (Scott & Ytreberg, 1998). Nevertheless, we find two suggestions highly problematic: "Look for methods which enable students to connect the words or sentences that they are learning in English to their daily lives" and "Try to eliminate the use of Spanish during the class." We will address the former in the next section when we review Unit Two.

Inglés Enciclomedia suggests that teachers eliminate the use of Spanish. The use of the first language in the foreign language classrooms has been a contested issue (4). In communicative language classrooms, the use of students' first language is ignored or not recommended as a practice. Teachers are encouraged to use it "judiciously" (Turnbull, 2001). García (2009) argues that the separation of languages is due to a monoglossic view of languages that has been prevalent in the second language education and bilingual education literature. In other words, languages are regarded as separate entities that must be kept apart. Cummins (2008) challenges the elimination of the use of students' first language in the classroom based on two well accepted principles: "(a) the role of preexisting

knowledge as a foundation for learning . . . and (b) the interdependence of proficiency across languages" (p. 67). Students start learning a second language using the schema that is encoded in their first language and the knowledge of one language transfers to the other language.

In the case of *Inglés Enciclomedia*, the suggestion to eliminate Spanish is problematic in three ways. First, it assumes that all children in Mexico speak Spanish. Once again, the creators of *Inglés Enciclomedia* ignore or choose to ignore the fact Mexico is a pluricultural and plurilingual society. This reinforces the hegemony of the Spanish language over the Indigenous national languages. Second, *Inglés Enciclomedia* is based on the idea that Mexican teachers with no knowledge of the English language will be able to teach it or learn it along with the students. If teachers do not know the English language and the program encourages those teachers not to use Spanish, what language are the teachers going to use to communicate with the students? Will the teachers be regarded as legitimate "teachers" when their voice is taken away from them and their intelligence is reduced to the English words, phrases, and/or sentences provided by *Inglés Enciclomedia*? The idea behind an English-only approach in their classrooms may keep teachers from venturing into the teaching process using naturally acquired language learning strategies, especially for those already bilingual teachers (an Indigenous language and Spanish).Third, Mexican teachers and children could use their knowledge encoded in their first language (be it Spanish and/or an Indigenous language) to make connections and analyze the new vocabulary, grammatical structures and functions of the English language. Both Spanish and English share a lot of similarities since both languages have Latin as one of their roots, English especially at the academic level (Cummins, 2000). Mexican teachers and children do have a lot to offer to each other when learning English. This is taken away from them if their first language is eliminated in the classroom.

Inglés Enciclomedia's Unit Two

The first unit of *Inglés Enciclomedia* focuses on six main lessons: introduction to English, greetings and numbers, countries, school subjects, school objects, and colors. Unit Two has six lessons: greetings and the alphabet, family, physical descriptions I and II, occupations, and pets. We decided to focus on Unit Two because it starts introducing more content that may or may not be grounded in Mexican's children lives. We will focus on the lessons that teach about family and occupations. We will relate this to the lives of the children at Downtown School.

Lesson Two introduces seven family members with pictures of each of them with a tree on the background. The family members introduced are grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, brother, sister, and "me." On the next pages, two different families are presented: Juan's family and Lupe's family. Juan's family includes a mother, a father and four siblings who are presented as living under the same roof. Lupe's family includes a mother, a father and three siblings who are also together under the same roof. Interestingly, the pictures of most of these family members portray people with brown skin and black hair, except for one sibling in each family, a girl with fair skin and blond hair in Juan's family and

a boy with fair skin and blond hair in Lupe's family. The lesson concludes with an exercise where students have to write about their family.

At Downtown School, children are growing in complex families. *Inglés Enciclo-media* reinforces the construct of the nuclear family that lives together. In the pedagogical suggestions teachers are encouraged to look for methods which enable students to connect the words or sentences that they are learning in English to their daily lives. Nevertheless, one of the major problems of *Inglés Enciclome-dia* might be the restrictive content it provides to children. Teachers have no control whatsoever over the contents of the English program. All children in Mexico will learn exactly the same thing irrespective of their sociocultural context and their personal background. Every child in Mexico will learn how to say "grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, brother and sister." There is no room for extended family members that might be important in the children's lives. The software could have easily included an electronic bilingual or multilingual dictionary as part of the software where teachers and children could check other words that they might be interested in learning or that represent their current realities more closely. However, this is not the case. The use of dictionaries is not mentioned in the pedagogical suggestions either. Teachers appear to be simply technicians who will click on a mouse to learn/teach the words that someone behind a desk at ELLIS headquarters thought that all Mexican children should learn.

Lesson Five teaches children vocabulary that relates to occupations. It connects the vocabulary to the family members presented in Lesson Two. The occupations introduced are: artist, engineer, doctor, farmer, teacher, secretary, and taxi driver. Unlike Lesson Two, which introduced the vocabulary with cartoons, this lesson introduces the occupations with photos of "real" people. On the top right corner of the page, next to the word-bank containing the vocabulary, there is the photo of an engineer. The engineer is portrayed by a blond, fair-skinned middle aged man who is wearing glasses and a white dress shirt, a tie, and a black suit. He is holding a blueprint of a project and is giving instructions with his right hand. Next to him, there is a young black man who is wearing a casual blue shirt, jeans, and a red helmet. He is receiving the instructions from the engineer.

In the next set of photos, we find a doctor who is portrayed by an Asian-looking woman wearing a white gown. She is tending to an Asian-looking young girl who has hurt her arm. The photo of the teacher is next to the doctor's. The teacher is a light-skinned woman who has short black hair. She is wearing a preppy outfit: khaki pants, a white shirt with a blue vest on top. The children are raising their hands to answer a question. One of the hands is black, a second is brown, and a third is fair. The teacher is calling on the fair-skinned student. The photo of a secretary, who is beside the teacher, appears to be another Asian woman. She is wearing a brown blouse and glasses, and is working in front of a computer. In the last row of photos, we find a farmer, an artist, and a taxi driver. The farmer appears to be a middle-aged fair-skinned man. He is wearing glasses, a cap, and a bright red t-shirt and is standing in the middle of a golden wheat field. There is a big truck in the background. The "artist" is portrayed as a light-skinned, grayish-haired painter who is sketching a painting of what appears to be France's *Arc de Triomphe*. In the last photo on the page, we see a taxi driver. The man appears to be Italian. He is wearing a brown casual shirt and a black hat. There

is a button on his hat that reads "I ♥ NY." He is sitting in his yellow taxicab, smiling happily.

The portrayals of these occupations are highly problematic. ELLIS may be exporting the stereotypical racial, classist, and gendered practices prevalent in the United States and masked by the American dream ideology into Mexico. The engineer is giving orders to a black man, who appears to his subordinate—his employee. The doctor, the teacher, and the secretary are portrayed by women. The doctor and teacher fit the profile of the caring person who works with children. In these three pictures, there are two Asian-looking women reinforcing the stereotypical view of successful Asian people who, with their hard work and determination, achieve prestigious occupations. In the last set of photos, the farmer and artist appear to be "Anglo." The taxi driver, on the other hand, looks Italian. His portrayal of a happy man with an "unprofessional" job indexes the construct of the United States as the land of opportunity where immigrants find work, demonstrate effort, and live a happy life, the equation of the American dream. None of these photos includes African-American or Mexican-American people in any of these roles. If the black man appeared, he was a construction worker and nothing else.

Not only do these photos and occupational roles appear to reinforce stereotypes, they are also disconnected from the occupations of the parents and children at Downtown School, and possibly of Mexicans in general. At Downtown School, only two parents had university-degree occupations: an accountant and a lawyer. Some children and some parents worked in agriculture as *jornaleros*. However, the picture of the farmer is far from the reality faced by these students' families. The person in the picture represents the agricultural boss, who may take advantage of Indigenous people both in Mexico and in the United States (Díaz Cruz, 2004). At Downtown School, there were Triqui students. The Triqui mothers in Oaxaca are weaving artists, who create intricate patterns in their *huipiles* (5). However, the portrayal of an artist in *Inglés Enciclomedia* does not represent the Triqui mothers or other Mexican artists: potters, sculptors, and weavers. Later in the lesson, children are asked to connect the occupations in this lesson to family members in order to introduce them to other people. Children at Downtown School would have a difficult time in completing the exercise especially because their family members do not fit any of these profiles. One of the major problems of *Inglés Enciclomedia* might be its restrictive content that does not speak to the realities of the children at Downtown School, nor to those of millions of other children around Mexico.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have identified the strengths and weaknesses of *Inglés Enciclomedia*. The software offers appealing, colorful and interesting materials and games. It also provides audio and video files with interactive controls, and entertaining activities to recycle vocabulary. Most of the pedagogical suggestions appear to be grounded in best practices in teaching children. They encourage teachers to engage children in active participation while having fun, use TPR, be mindful of children's short attention span, provide comprehensible input, and create a safe classroom atmosphere.

We also criticized *Inglés Enciclomedia* because it connects English to the United States, its stereotypes, and the so-called native speakers, and reinforces the hegemony of the Spanish language over Indigenous languages. The software includes a U.S. flag to represent the English language. In the next version, the developers could include a different flag in every unit to acknowledge different inner, outer and expanding circle countries. They could also include the voices of people from different countries and encourage teachers to discuss the linguistic diversity of the English language. Regarding the use of the Mexican flag to represent and make use of the Spanish language in the software, the software could include different Indigenous languages present in Mexico. Different languages could be used in different units, so all Mexican children learn about Mexico's linguistic and cultural diversity. The teacher guide should encourage teachers to discuss Mexico's pluriligualism and interculturalism in order to change discriminatory practices against Indigenous peoples (Maldonado Alvarado, 2002; Molina Cruz, 2000; Montes García, 2004; Rockwell, 2004). Mexico is constitutionally a plurilingual and intercultural country and the teaching of English must respect, value and work towards these two ideals.

We also criticized *Inglés Enciclomedia* because its contents do not speak to the realities of the low-SES children that we found in the Oaxacan urban school we took as a reference, the children that the program claims to be most beneficial for: the poor, the technologically deprived, the ones that need English to compete. If *Inglés Enciclomedia* wishes to be a cutting-edge project, it must include a multilingual dictionary in the software and become a customizable program. In other words, the content of the program needs to speak to the reality of a variety of schools. Focusing on the two lessons we analyzed, the program could list several occupations and several family members that the teachers could select from, or have teachers create their own, locally appropriate lists, so that children would be able to connect them to their real lives or the imagined lives they want to work towards. Children from across Mexico could contribute their drawings and their photos, so that the multimodalities in *Inglés Enciclomedia* are truly "Mexican" (see Figure 1 for a collage of materials created by the children in the CEAR Project). According to Avendaño Aquino, it might be possible to upload materials and texts created by Mexican children to *Enciclomedia* (Avendaño Aquino, personal communication, January 2009).

Figure 4: Materials created by the children in the CEAR Project.

Inglés Enciclomedia does not seem to take into account the English teachers graduating from the TESOL programs around Mexico. We are aware that preparing English teachers for every classroom in all public elementary schools in Mexico will require a good number of years. Meanwhile, the ministry could hire expert English teachers to support non-English-speaking elementary school teachers. For instance, one English teacher could support an entire elementary school or two according to the size. In this way, the English teacher, the elementary school teacher, and *Inglés Enciclomedia* could work together to teach English in a responsive, intercultural and plurilingual manner. It is essential for English teacher preparation programs, *Inglés Enciclomedia*, and any language policy, curriculum or materials to adopt an intercultural and plurilingual approach if we are to support *all* Mexican children, especially those who have been discriminated against.

Notes

1. Watch the whole video at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoVruqiWTn0).
2. Visit www.inali.gob.mx to learn more about the linguistic rights of Indigenous peoples in Mexico.
3. See Subsecretaría de Educación Básica (2009) for the number of schools, teachers, and students in different states that piloted the project.
4. See Cummins (2008) for a historical review of the issue.
6. See López Gopar (2007) for a description of the meaning of Triqui huipiles.

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